

conversion into vanillin is effected in an aqueous phase which is contacted with an organic phase which extracts said at least one desired component.

43. (New) A method according to claim 4 including a preliminary step of obtaining a strain of microorganism for use in or step (ii) of claim 4 comprising screening a multiplicity of colonies by means of a reagent suitable for detecting aldehydes.

44. (New) A method according to claim 43 wherein the multiplicity of colonies are obtained by mutation.

45. (New) A method according to claim 14, wherein said conversion into vanillin is effected in an aqueous phase which is contacted with an organic phase which extracts said at least one desired component.

REMARKS

The purpose of this preliminary amendment is to 1) reduce the number of multiply dependent claims; 2) insert a priority claim into the specification and 3) provide a copy of the abstract on a separate sheet.

Favorable consideration leading to prompt allowance of the present application is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,
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Enclosures:

[illegible]

3. (Amended) A method according to claim 1 [or 2] wherein said strain is capable of producing both vanillic acid and vanillin from ferulic acid, the ratio thereof being pH-dependant; and wherein a pH is selected and maintained which relatively favo[u]rs accumulation of vanillin.

6. (Amended) A method according to [any preceding] claim 1 including a preliminary step of obtaining said first composition comprising ferulic acid from a plant material by a process comprising:

(a) treating the plant material to produce a solution containing a ferulic acid ester; and

(b) treating said solution with an enzyme composition having ferulic acid esterase activity under conditions such that ferulic acid esters are converted into ferulic acid.

9. (Amended) A method according to claim 6 [,7 or 8] wherein in step (a) the plant material is treated with a solution containing citric acid.

12. (Amended) A method according to [any of] claim[s] 6 [to 11] wherein step (b) employs an enzyme derived from a species of *Aspergillus* or *Humicola insolens*.

17. (Amended) A process according to [any of] claim[s] 14 [to 17] wherein said ferulic acid ester is provided in the form of plant material, said microorganism acting directly on said plant material.

18. (Amended) A method according to [any of] claim[s] 14 [to 17] wherein said second composition is treated with one or more further microorganisms for converting said vanillic acid into vanillin.

21. (Amended) A method according to [any of] claim[s] 1 [to 13 or 18 to 20] wherein said conversion into vanillin is effected in an aqueous phase which is contacted with an organic phase which extracts said at least one desired component.

22. (Amended) A method according to claim 1 [or claim 4] including a preliminary step of obtaining a strain of microorganism for use in the method of claim 1 [or step (ii) of claim 4] comprising screening a multiplicity of colonies by means of a reagent suitable for detecting aldehydes.

32. (Amended) A genetically engineered organism which has been transformed with nucleic acid derived directly or indirectly from [the] a strain selected from the group consisting of *Pseudomonas putida* NCIMB40988 or mutant thereof, *Rhodotorula glutinis* IMI379896 or mutant thereof, *Penicillium chrysogenum* IMI379900 or mutant thereof, *Aspergillus flavus* IMI379895 or mutant thereof, *Aspergillus niger* IMI379904 or mutant thereof, *Pseudomonas putida* IMI382568 or mutant thereof, *Aspergillus fumigatus* IMI379902 or mutant thereof, and *Micromucor isabellinus* IMI379893 or mutant thereof [defined in any of claims 24 to 31 and has thereby acquired the capability set out in that claim] said genetically engineered organism being capable of converting ferulic acid ester into vanillic acid.

33. (Amended) An extract or enzyme(s) [of an organism [defined in any of claims 24 to 32 possessing the activity specified for the organism] isolated from an organism of claim 32.